The Deadeye From Cortez Street

The following is an excerpt from an article that appeared in the February 3, 1946 issue of the Portland Oregonian. It was written by Herman Edwards:

" The single door through which a steady procession of soldiers had entered and departed from the little one-room building banged with annoying frequency and despite the occasional savage slamming that jarred the shack of a building, the door never seemed to remain closed, at least for more than a few seconds.

" Can't someone keep that damned door shut ?" a sergeant barked angrily. Blasts of raw, cold air from the snow-covered San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California were chilling the blood of the sergeant and his companions, blood thinned by long months in the tropics. But no one looked up.

Men hurried about the room, others shuffled stacks of paper on tables and in boxes and there was a bustle and noisy turmoil like that sometimes found in the city room of a big newspaper when a deadline is near and big news stories are being rushed to press. Often a soldier would stop and shake hands with another--the solemn handshake of old friends saying good-bye.

On this Saturday night, February 2, 1946, at Camp Anza, near Riverside, California, one of the army's finest infantry divisions was being broken-up.

The Oregon-trained 96th Division, the Deadeyes of Leyte and Okinawa fame, was in the last stages of it's inactivation and before this time tomorrow the last of it's men were scheduled to be on their way to army separation centers, their last stop before home and return to civilian life.

In Camp Anza's beer halls, service clubs and officers' club other men of the Division were saying good-bye to one another, for this was the parting of the ways for the Deadeyes who had been comrades in their baptism of fire on Leyte's beaches, and on bloody Kakazu Ridge and Conical Hill on Okinawa.

On Sunday morning the Division's units fell in for their last formal assembly. No flags waved, no bands played as they had on so many occasions in the past. Less than 2,000 men now constituted the Division, and they stood quietly, in a chilling rain, to hear their final instructions, chiefly relating to troop train departures.

Their commander, Maj. Gen. James L. Bradley, who activated the Division on August 15, 1942, at Camp Adair, Oregon, was with them to the last.

" This is the saddest day of my life," he said to them Saturday as they reached Camp Anza and he made his farewell talk to the men he described as the best he had ever known.

To the men of the 96th that weekend was one of the happiest in their lives, but despite the eagerness of the GI's to get home there was an indefinable air of sadness about the scene as the great fighting machine passed into history."

A British military man wrote in 1923 that infantry forces of the future would be small, highly specialized, and "transported in protected vehicles to consolidate territory won from an enemy." Among several million young infantrymen who, twenty years later, found this a decidedly cloudy forecast of their duties, few were more disillusioned than the men of our 96th Infantry Division. They were rarely transported in vehicles, never protected, and the only territory they ever got to consolidate was what they won for themselves. Winning it cost some 2,000 of them their lives.

One of these men was Staff Sergeant Casimir T. Marchewka, a cousin whom I had never known.

The combat infantrymen of the 96th were like warriors out of another century. The trucks and jeeps, the flame throwers and the tanks were new, but the tactics were pure Davy Crockett and Sam Houston at the Alamo. It was the ancient pattern of men dashing across open ground in short rushes, crawling on their bellies to enemy outposts, and circling to get in the enemy's rear. On one eerie morning among the boulders of an Okinawa ridge, Company F, of the division's 381st Infantry Regiment, fought a battle that a War Department historian described as "straight Western-movie stuff", complete with shots from the hip and close-in knife play.

One observer on Okinawa swore when he returned to Washington that they were "the finest exponents of alley fighting." The Deadeye's he claimed, were "the best bunch of fighters since the Alamo." In fact, he added, the 96th was the "perfect infantry division." As their division newspaper put it, they made "good Japs"--dead ones--out of 7,600 of their enemy on Leyte, and 31,700 more on Okinawa.

The 96th was one of the original sad-sack, all draftee divisions. In August, 1942, when it began training at Camp Adair, Oregon, the bewildered young men who filled its' ranks had no idea of how to go about saving their country. They were tough and serious, yet they still kept their sense of humor. In a contest to become the Division's "pin up girl," movie star Marjorie Main won, Joan Leslie came in second, June Allyson and Yvonne DeCarlo tied for third.

The 96th was a triangular division, built around three infantry regiments--the 381st, 382nd, and 383rd. Casey Marchewka would be assigned to the 381st.

In a simple ceremony on August 15, 1942, the new division was officially incorporated into the wartime army of the United States of America. At that time Maj. General James L. Bradley stated a thesis which he was to repeat time and again during the Division's training:

"We of the 96th Division have a clearly defined task. It is to become a well-trained combat division in the shortest possible time. We must keep our eyes, we must keep our thoughts on that goal. Any time we spend on efforts which do not lead to that goal is time wasted--and we have no time to waste."

"This is the kind of a division we are going to be: well trained, tough physically and mentally, ready and eager to fight, not for our personal glory or advancement but for the honor of the division and the service of our country." As to the nature of the job that lay ahead and the alternatives that faced his men, he spoke with typical bluntness. "We kill," he said, "or we get killed."

Their shoulder patch was a white diamond and blue diamond which overlap, both being superimposed on a six-sided patch with khaki background. The white and blue diamonds represented purity and courage, respectively.

General Bradley placed the marksmanship training of the entire Division under the supervision of Brig. Gen. Claudius M. Easley who was one of the Army's crack marksmen. With Easley, marksmanship was a passion. The name "Deadeye's" sprang directly from the insistence of this sharp-shooting Texan that the men of the 96th should be satisfied with nothing less than bull's eyes.

Casimir T. Marchewka was inducted into the United States Army on 15 October 1942, one week before his twenty-first birthday.

He left his home and parents at 1453 W. Cortez Street in Chicago, Illinois by streetcar for the induction center on Van Buren Street, in Downtown Chicago. Soon he was train-bound for the Pacific Northwest along with hundreds of young men from Chicago and the middle-west area. In fact, almost 80% of the Division's original personnel came from Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa. Many more came from Arkansas and the South. They had no military tradition to uphold and no ambitions except to get it over with and go home.

The Division's officers and non-com's had to train these farmers and mechanics, school teachers and clerks amidst the fertile farmlands of the Willamette Valley in Oregon.

Casey Marchewka and scores of Chicagoland draftees probably travelled on "The Milwaukee Road" from Union Station in Chicago to Minneapolis, Minn. There they changed trains to the Great Northern Ry's,"Empire Builder" and travelled across the top of the United States to Seattle, Washington. There they briefly stopped for coal and water before heading to Portland, Oregon. At Portland they probably transferred to the Southern Pacific train that would take them south to ~~Corvalis~~ Corvallis, Oregon. There they met other draftees and together boarded busses for the six mile trip north to Camp Adair.

Tell about Corvallis!

For most of the young men arriving daily at Camp Adair, this was the farthest they had ever been from their homes. During the war enlisted men from all forty-eight states came to Camp Adair for training in the mid-Willamette Valley. From 1942 to 1944 over 100,000 G.I's trained for combat there. Perhaps the most lasting memory for many soldier's was Oregon's rain. After sloshing through the Oregon countryside, marching, pushing and pulling vehicles through the mud and fording swollen streams, Casey and many others called the camp..."Swamp Adair."

Under Maj. Gen. James L. Bradley, the miracle of the 96th was built-up over a two and a half year period, through two winters of garrison training in Oregon, three months of maneuvering on the central Oregon desert, capsuled courses in amphibious and jungle warfare in Hawaii in July, 1944 and finally, a rugged introduction to the Japanese infantry on Leyte in the Philippine Islands. By the time he reached the Philippines, Casey Marchewka had been promoted to the rank of Staff Sgt. On the ship bound for the Philippines a Navy man who had been present for two previous amphibious invasions, when asked what it would be like replied, "It's like a picnic, until the briefing starts."

"That's when you begin realizing there's a war going on and your in it. Later when the big guns open-up and the bombardment starts, you get a tight feeling in your stomach which begins spreading all over your body. And when D-day arrives, buddy, you know damn well it's raining down on your girl's pretty dress and your cold chicken sandwiches."

The pea-green 96th was among the divisions which spearheaded the return to the Philippines. The Deadeye's and the seasoned 7th Division left Pearl Harbor in September, 1944. Admiral "Bull" Halsey radioed from the far Pacific that the Philippines were ripe for invasion. From Quebec, Canada where Roosevelt and Churchill were meeting, authorization was flashed for a one-two punch---first Leyte, then Luzon. Planning staffs went on a twenty-four hour workday, and on October 20th, the XXIV Corps hit Central Leyte.

On that pivotal island the Deadeye's distinguished themselves as swamp fighters, always knee-deep, often hip-deep in mud and slime. In three days they had outdistanced their supplies. General MacArthur visited the 96th Division's command post the third day after the landing.

When General Bradley showed him on the map just where our men were, MacArthur exclaimed: "That's impossible ! No man can get through those swamps." Bradley answered simply: "Nevertheless, they are there."

Back at the coast, Col. Michael E. (Screamin' Mike) Halloran's 381st Regiment attacked Catmon Hill, the ominous high-point which dominated the entire Corps beachhead. Already flanked by the 383rd and hammered by incessant artillery fire, it fell quickly. By October 28th, the beachhead was secure. Staff Sgt. Casey Marchewka was doing well the job they trained him for...a combat infantryman. He earned his "Blue Badge of Courage" on Leyte.

Nine Deadeye's won the Distinguished Service Cross on Leyte, but four of them died winning it. There was Pvt. Ova Allen Kelley, from Norwood, Missouri, a sturdy, dark-haired boy whose job was packing ammunition on his back. One morning in December he started firing bullets and throwing grenades instead of carrying them. When he was through, his company had retrieved an airfield from the Japs, and Kelley, who had stalked forward alone, wiped out half the enemy before anyone else knew what was happening.

He was awarded the Division's first Medal of Honor. Five minutes later a sniper cut him down.

Even while the 96th was still fighting in the hills of Leyte, planning was underway for an operation oddly known as "Iceberg." On 3 October 1944 American forces in the Pacific received a directive to seize positions in the Ryukyu Islands. Okinawa is the most important Island of the Ryukyu Group, the threshold of the four main islands of Japan. The decision to invade the Ryukyus, code named "Iceberg" signaled the readiness of the United States to penetrate the inner ring of Japanese defenses. For the enemy, failure on Okinawa meant that he must prepare to resist an early invasion of the homeland or surrender.

On Easter Sunday, 1 April,1945 the American 10th Army and Staff Sgt. Casey Marchewka poured across the ancient seawall guarding the Island of Okinawa. The 96th was short of combat strength by 39 officers and 1,200 enlisted men. The German breakthrough in December, 1944, when Casey's cousin, Capt. Edward A. Nachowitz was killed on 27 December, had resulted in wholesale diversion to the European Theatre, of troops who had initially been earmarked as Pacific replacements.

Few of the men of the 96th, including Staff Sgt. Casey Marchewka had ever heard of this obscure island called Okinawa before they assaulted its' beaches. A careful look at the map however, made it very clear, that Okinawa held the key to victory in the Pacific.

On March 25, 1945 the invasion Fleet carrying the assault infantry of the 96th Division weighed anchor from Leyte Gulf and set sail for their next destination, Okinawa

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Move Hawaii 330 miles off the coast of California and you have the American equivalent. Okinawa appears on the map as a misshapen snake, 67miles long and only 3 to 10 miles wide. It was fringed by coral reefs and doubly defended by an ancient seawall and 77,000 Japanese garrisoned there.

The 96th Division landed on Okinawa with hardly any resistence at all. However, inthe outposts of what was to become known as the Shuri Line, the Japanese Thirty-second Army, commanded by Lt. General Mitsuru Ushijima was waiting for Sgt. Marchewka and the riflemen in the squads of Company M.

The Shuri Line was a rock and concrete maze of interlocking hills, caves and pillboxes. It was not to fall for fifty-seven days, and then only under the combined assault of four Army and Marine Divisions.. But for two weeks the 96th and the 7th Divisions hammered it alone.

On April 9th, on an obscure little ridge named Kakazu, the Deadeyes' 383rd Regiment went to its Calvary. Of six companies that attacked, only three made it to the crest.

About half the men who had charged up the hill ultimately made it down safely. Pfc. Ed Moskala, of Chicago, the last man down, learned that a wounded buddy was still on the hill. He went back and brought him down. Twice more he went back into the inferno, and the final time he did not come out. His buddies, those who survived, say he killed twenty-five or thirty Japs during that retreat. They also knew that he earned his Medal of Honor, the second awarded to a Deadeye.

On 15 April 1945, S/Sgt. Casey Marchewka was lightly wounded in action. It was from shrapnel from an enemy shell-burst. He was in the vicinity of a place called Uchitomari. He suffered a superficial laceration wound in the right lumbar region of his back but was not hospitalized. It was on the following day when a young man named Beauford T. (Snuffy) Anderson won himself a Medal of Honor that night by turning back an entire company of Japanese without assistance. His method was unique and effective...he used mortar shells as hand grenades. His Medal of Honor was the Deadeyes third since they left Hawaii a year earlier. By now it was obvious that two divisions could never break the Japanese line, and the fresh 27th Division was readied for action. A few days later, behind the most pulverizing artillery bombardment of the Pacific was, the three divisions jumped off in a coordinated attack.

It seemed incomceivable that anything could live where the big shells had fallen, but the burrowing enemy simply took to its' caves. When the three divisions moved out, sudden death still waited for them.

On the night of 23 April, the enemy silently evacuated the entire Kakazu-Nishibaru ridge line , and two days later the Deadeyes drove to the crest of a weird stone formation which the infantry called Hacksaw Ridge. Casey and his buddies probably called it something much more profane. Here the 381st Regiment found itself squatting on the lid of a vast fortress hollowed into rock and concrete. Any Deadeye who moved beyond the crest came under fire from inside the ridge as well as around it. Each night the Japanese poured in counterattacks from innumerable caves within the ridge. Here Capt. Bill Bollinger's F Company fought the wild west battle mentioned earlier. Here Sgt. Bill Reeder, a professional baseball player threw the finest strikes of his career...with hand grenades.

Off to one side, a Japanese-held concrete barracks was giving the Americans a very bad time. Lt. Col. Danny Nolan, who commanded the third battalion, sent his K Company to take it out. At this point, K Company consisted of only thirty-six men.

Soon it was down to twenty-four. In the midst of the struggle, Nolan called Capt. Albert Strand, the company commander, and asked him how things were going. Strand replied, "I can see more Japs to my front than I have men, but I think I can advance."

The 382nd Regiment meanwhile was fighting on the direct approaches to Shuri. Here Capt. Seymour Terry of Arkansas who helped spark the 96th Division, singlehandedly cleaned-out a whole network of caves and trenches. His Medal of Honor, and the Division's fourth, was posthumous...three days later, he and thirteen of his men were killed by a single flurry of Japanese artillery. Here the men of Company E charged up the slopes of a murderous hill called "Big Apple" and held it with a gallantry that was to win them a unit citation. Here Pfc. John MacKenis, of Company C , cooly assumed command of a platoon when there were no officers or NCO's left. Here the entire regiment was engaged in fighting of such savagery that when the casualty lists were added up at the end of the campaign, the 382nd Infantry, of all the Army regiments on Okinawa, proved to be the hardest hit.

In the early morning hours of 27 April 1945, just after midnight, Staff Sgt. Casimir T. Marchewka died in battle. He was killed in action 800 yards south of a place on the maps called KAKAZU, by shrapnel from a Japanese shellburst. The morning report of Company M, signed by the company commander, Capt. Parker B. Poe and dated 28 April 1945, indicates that S/Sgt. Marchewka died instantly of expensive penetrating wounds inflicted on the left side of his head and jaw. Also believed killed by the same shellburst were Pfc. Robert Petersen and 2ndLt. William J. Crump.

Relief of the 381st Regiment by the 307th was completed by mid-morning of 29 April. It came too late for S/Sgt. Casey Marchewka. Since the landing on 1 April, the Regiment had suffered 1,021 casualties, most of them in the rifle companies. Many platoons were down to only five or six men. Its combat efficiency at that point was estimated at only forty percent.

The 96th Division retired from the lines with honor. For thirty days the Deadeyes had waged bloody warfare against a skillful and determined enemy, who at every point, was looking down their throats. They had stood fast under everything he could throw at them. At a press conference at Tenth Army Hqs. General Buckner was unstinting in his praise.

"The divisions on the south have had hard going, particularly the 96th, which has had heavy opposition ever since landing," he said. "The spirit of the Division in the face of constant attrition and heavy casualties has been superb."

For a week the normal misery of combat had been heightened by a drizzling rain. On May 22nd it became a continuous downpour. Movement became impossible and the entire 10th Army offensive ground to a halt. The 96th Division G-3 one day summed up the Deadeyes progress in these terms: "Those on the forward slopes slid down. Those on the reverse slopes slid back. Otherwise, no change."

On the eve of the great rain, the 1st Battalion of the 382nd Regiment had made a remarkable charge through Japanese mortar fire to a point just below the crest of "Oboe Hill", the highest ridge in the Shuri ring. It was a notably unhealthy position, for the enemy was snugly entrenched on the other side of the crest. All day, every day they harassed Lt. Col. Charles W. Johnson's men, who were clinging desperately to the slime-covered slopes. Then each night the Japanese came boiling over the crest.

Twice the Americans were driven to the base of the hill; twice they clambered back up. Johnson, who had entered the Army four years earlier as a nineteen year-old private, finally threw even his jeep drivers into the line. The line held, but by weeks end the first battalion was so small that, for the balance of the campaign it fought as a single company.

The weather broke on May 30th, and so did the enemy. Under the cover of the rain, Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima, a brilliant commander, had withdrawn the bulk of his shattered army. So the Americans, for the most part, simply walked into Shuri.

On a place called "Hen Hill", in the path of the 382nd Regiment's G Company, the enemy made its' stand. This set the stage for a Santa Ana, California, truck driver named Clarence Craft to put on a dazzling individual display of courage. In a classic one-man charge, he killed more than twenty-five Japanese with grenades, rifle and bayonet, stopping in the middle to pick up a sword for his family. "I knew those guys behind me would have that place stripped clean of souvenirs by the time I got back," he said later. The most remarkable thing about his Medal of Honor was that he lived to receive it. His was the fifth won by the division.

On June 18, the 10th Army Chief, General Buckner was the victim of a Japanese shellburst. The next day, Brig. Gen. Claudius M. Easley, the 96th Division's Asst. Commander, was killed while personally directing fire against a machine gun which had wounded his aide. Easley, a sharp-shooting Texan and the man for whose training they were nicknamed "Deadeyes" had been tempting death since the Division's first day on Leyte. Once before he had been wounded; it was perhaps inevitable that he should die as he did...shooting it out with the enemy at close range. A machine-gun burst hit him in the forehead and killed him instantly. He may have been the last General of the United States Army to die in that heroic tradition.

Sixteen hundred other soldiers of the 96th died no less honorably on Okinawa. Fifty-six hundred more brought wounds home with them. In the infantry regiments, one man in two had fallen. But the Deadeyes wiped out more than 30,000 Japanese. The Okinawa Campaign ended on 20 June 1945. It wasn't done in the manner the prophets imagined after the First World War, or again after this one. Perhaps they are right this time, and any future war will be conducted by men at push buttons. But it still might be handy to have some troops like the Deadeyes, Casey Marchewka, brave men who will come to grips with the individual enemy and fight it out to the death.

In the final stages of the island's fighting the 96th Infantry Division marked-up a record for a single day's action. More than 1,800 Japanese Infantrymen were killed on the Yaeju Dake cliffs. That record still stands. On a day in June, 1945 they killed more of the enemy than any Division in the history of the United States Army.

The Battle of Okinawa was the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific Theatre of World War 2 as well as the last pitched battle of the entire war. The 96th Infantry Division is one of only four entire Army Divisions awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for heroic action during World War 2.

The Army brought Casimir T. Marchewka's flag-draped coffin back home in March, 1949, four years after the war had ended. A Requiem Mass was celebrated in his memory on 24 March 1949 at Holy Trinity Catholic Church on Noble Street where he was baptized twenty-three years earlier and later made his First Holy Communion. He was intered at the family gravesite in St. Adalbert's Cemetery, Niles, Illinois, in the St. Hyacinth Section, Lot 6, Block D. He was laid to rest next to his sister Maryanna who died in infancy and his sister Victoria who died in 1926 at the age of two. His parents were later buried there, also.

His gravestone reads:

CASIMIR T. MARCHEWKA

Born October 24, 1921 Died April 27, 1945

S/Sgt. U.S.Army 381st Inf. 96th Division

Died on Okinawa WW2

I was eleven years old when he died. He was my Mother's first cousin. His mother was my Grandmother's older sister. I had never known him.

Staff Sgt. Casimir T. Marchewka earned the following awards from his grateful country:

The Bronze Star Medal

The Purple Heart Medal

The Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one Bronze Service Star

The World War II Victory Medal

The Combat Infantryman Badge

The Honorable Service Lapel Button (WWII)

This chronicle about the short life and tragic death of Casey Marchewka has been written so that his cousins, nieces and nephews and their children will never forget his memory or how and where he died in the service of his country.

In Loving Memory of

S-Sgt. Casimir T. Marchewka
UNITED STATES ARMY
Born, October 24th, 1921
who made the supreme sacrifice for His Country on Okinawa, Pacific area, April 27, 1945
Burial, Thursday, March 24th, 1949
Requiem Mass, Holy Trinity Church
Military Honors by Hearst Sq. Post 478 A. L.
at Rest, Saint Adalberts Cemetery